

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY / MIDDLE EAST UPDATE
February 16 - 23, 2012

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1. [Clinton Sees Opportunity for Somalia as AMISOM Expands Mission](#) (02-23-2012)

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — As the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) prepares to expand its area of responsibility beyond Mogadishu, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton says the world can now focus on how to build up Somalia after spending decades trying to prevent conflict, famine and terrorism in the country.

[Speaking in London February 23](#) after a conference on Somalia hosted by British Prime Minister David Cameron, Clinton said, “The opportunity is real.” The international community needs to work with Somalia’s Transitional Federal Government (TFG) as it prepares to hand over power by August and help “build a durable peace for the Somalia people and to support a government that delivers services and offers democracy and prosperity, uniting Somalia after so many years of division and chaos.”

Clinton welcomed the February 22 decision by the United Nations Security Council that expanded AMISOM’s mission from 12,000 to 17,731 troops, allowing the force to work in south-central Somalia. The Security Council also prohibited charcoal exports from Somalia, which have been an important funding source for the terrorist group al-Shabaab and have caused the country environmental harm and threatened its food security.

Somalis “need to see concrete improvements in their lives,” especially in areas recently liberated from al-Shabaab, Clinton said. She announced that the United States is providing an additional \$64 million in humanitarian assistance to Somalia and other Horn of Africa countries. The move brings U.S. emergency assistance since 2011 “up to more than \$934 million, including more than \$211 million for lifesaving programs in Somalia,” Clinton said.

In the fight against piracy, the United States is helping to strengthen the Somali judicial system to handle piracy cases and supports other measures such as the soon-to-be-launched Regional Anti-Piracy Prosecutions Intelligence Coordination Center in the Seychelles. The United States welcomes the United Kingdom’s initiative to create an international task force to discourage the payment of ransoms and help prevent the illicit flow of money in the region, the secretary said.

A senior State Department official who asked not to be identified told reporters traveling with Clinton on February 22 that the Obama administration is encouraging the TFG to adhere to a political road map developed in July and August 2011 that will establish more permanent governing institutions in Somalia by August 2012.

“The road map calls for the establishment of a constituent assembly, the drafting of a new constitution, and the indirect election of a new president, and a new parliament, and a new parliamentary speaker,” [the official said](#). Anyone who undermines the process “should be held accountable for their actions.”

“In the last 18 months, we have seen all of Mogadishu liberated from the control of al-Shabaab. And we now need to see the political progress and the development progress match the security gains that we continue to see,” the official said.

The official said the expansion of AMISOM will include approximately 4,000 Kenyan troops who are being made members of the mission, as well as two new battalions of Ugandan troops, one new battalion of Burundian troops, and the expansion of the Djiboutian force from 100 troops to a full 600-person battalion.

The official said the United States has paid about one-third of the cost of AMISOM’s mission, or \$385 million over the past three years.

[Secretary Clinton’s Press Briefing in London on Somalia, Syria](#)

2. U.N. Report Says Syrian Forces Committed Gross Human Rights Abuses (02-23-2012)

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — A United Nations report says the Syrian regime has committed “widespread, systematic and gross human rights violations.”

The report, prepared by a three-member panel of investigators, was presented to the U.N. Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva February 23.

“A reliable body of evidence exists that, consistent with other verified circumstances, provides reasonable grounds to believe that particular individuals, including commanding officers and

officials at the highest levels of government, bear responsibility for crimes against humanity and other gross human rights violations,” the published report said.

“The human rights situation in the Syrian Arab Republic has deteriorated significantly since November 2011, causing further suffering to the Syrian people,” the report said. “Widespread violence and increasingly aggravated socio-economic conditions have left many communities in a perilous state.” For many if not most Syrians, meeting basic needs to sustain everyday life has become increasingly difficult.

The report is based on 369 interviews with victims, witnesses, defectors and others who have “inside knowledge” of the crisis in Syria. The investigators also examined photographs, video recordings, available government documents and satellite imagery of areas where military and security forces were deployed and related violations occurred. This evidence was used to corroborate a number of witness accounts, the U.N. report said.

The investigators also took into account a report from the observer mission of the Arab League from January 22, including interviews with former observers from that mission.

“The present situation risks further radicalizing the population, deepening inter-communal tensions and eroding the fabric of society,” the report said.

White House press secretary Jay Carney told reporters February 23 that the overwhelming number of victims of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s brutality are innocent, unarmed Syrian civilians.

“The victims here are overwhelmingly Syrians and the assault that Assad continues to wage against the Syrian people is heinous and unforgivable,” Carney said. “That’s why we’re working with a broad array and a growing array of international partners to isolate and pressure Assad to bring about a peaceful transition in that country, a transition which is inevitable and which is already under way.”

Carney said that the United States, led by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, will be an active participant in the “Friends of Syria” meeting in Tunis. Representatives from more than 70 nations are meeting to find ways to support Syria’s opposition forces, and to find ways to provide humanitarian assistance, especially urgently needed medical supplies in places such as Homs, which has been under attack by government forces for 20 consecutive days.

The U.N. investigators said they received credible and consistent evidence identifying high- and mid-ranking members of the armed forces who ordered their subordinates to shoot at unarmed protesters, kill soldiers who refused to obey such orders, arrest people without cause, mistreat detained persons and attack civilian neighborhoods using machine guns and armored tanks.

“The government has manifestly failed in its responsibility to protect its people,” the investigators said.

An effort to obtain a U.N. Security Council resolution to promote an Arab League peace plan failed when two permanent Security Council members — Russia and China — vetoed the measure. The Arab League plan called for a transition where Assad would relinquish power to his vice president and permit the creation of a unity government. The Damascus regime rejected that plan.

The 22-member Arab League suspended its observer mission in Syria, saying that it was unsafe to continue operations because of the “grave deterioration of the situation in Syria, and the continuation of violence and exchange of shelling and shooting.”

The United Nations estimates that 5,400 people have been killed in the fighting between rebel forces and the Syrian government security forces as of January. Newer information is unavailable because the information cannot be independently confirmed.

3. Dempsey Discusses U.S.-China Relations, Middle East Challenges (02-19-2012)

By Army Sgt. 1st Class Tyrone C. Marshall Jr.
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Feb. 19, 2012 – The military’s strategic shift to the Pacific region provides an opportunity to improve U.S.-China relations, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said today.

"In our re-strategy, we've taken a decision to rebalance ourselves toward the Pacific," Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey said during an interview with CNN’s Fareed Zakaria. "I think this is more opportunity than liability to improve our relationship with China and I am personally committed to having that as the outcome rather than get into an arms race or into some kind of confrontation with China."

Dempsey also discussed security challenges in the Middle East and said Egypt may produce the first democracy borne out of the Arab Spring civilian uprising that began a year ago.

"I do think that the Arab Spring can produce a democracy and I'd be eager to see a competition of ideas actually play out," he said. "But I'm concerned because in some ways I think the competition of ideas may be somewhat stymied."

The chairman, who visited Egypt earlier this month, said he spoke with senior Egyptian leaders regarding the release of 19 Americans being held and how it could impact relations.

"I can tell you we came to a very clear understanding of how serious this is," he said. "And also a clear understanding that our relationship would be somewhat stalled until this particular issue is resolved."

That said, Dempsey said he reinforced the importance of U.S.-Egyptian military relations. "I do believe that Egypt is, in many ways, a cornerstone of the future of the region in that if this Arab Spring is to have a positive outcome, I think we'll see it first in Egypt. The stakes are extraordinarily high and I made that clear."

Dempsey said he believes Egyptian military leaders are eager to cede power, although they maintain some vested interests. "I think that the various parties in Egypt are kind of circling each other trying to determine just what they intend to do," he said.

"My personal observation is I think that the military is actually eager to cede power because they've experienced how challenging it can be to, as they describe it, manage the street, manage the media, manage a judiciary."

Although the military has largely run the country for decades, Dempsey said, "they haven't been under the unblinking eye of the people in the media in this new world in which they find themselves."

Dempsey also discussed Israel's relationship with Iran and its potential to prevent Iran from achieving a nuclear weapons capability. "I think that Israel has the capability to strike Iran and delay the capability of Iran to achieve a nuclear weapons status probably for a couple of years," he said. "But some of the targets are probably beyond their reach, and of course that's what concerns them."

U.S. officials have told the Israelis that "it's not prudent at this point to decide to attack Iran," Dempsey said. "That's been our counsel to our allies, the Israelis," he said. "We also know, or believe we know, that the Iranian regime has not decided that they will embark on the efforts to weaponize their nuclear capability."

"I'm confident that they understand our concerns," Dempsey said, "that a strike at this point would be destabilizing and wouldn't achieve their long-term objectives." He added that he understands Israel's unique national security challenges.

On a recent trip to Israel, Dempsey said, he had candid conversations with senior Israeli leaders.

Dempsey said he believes it would be premature to use the military option for Iran while diplomacy is effective. "I think that the economic sanctions and the international cooperation that we've been able to gather around sanctions is beginning to have an effect," he said. "I think that our diplomacy is having an effect, and our preparedness."

U.S. officials believe Iran is "a rational actor," and as long as that is the case, Dempsey said, "we think the current path that we're on is the most prudent at this point."

Biographies:

[Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey](#)

4. U.S., EU Want Sustained and Productive Talks with Iran (02-17-2012)

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton welcomed Iran's apparent offer to resume talks with the United States and its partners in the P5+1 as "an important step" and said the offer is being closely analyzed.

"This response from the Iranian government is one we've been waiting for and if we do proceed, it will have to be a sustained effort that can produce results," [Clinton told reporters](#) at the State Department February 17 in remarks with the European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton.

Ashton has been representing France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia, China and the United States — collectively known as the P5+1 — in discussions stemming over international concern that Iran is developing nuclear weapons under the cover of a civilian nuclear program.

In a written response to Ashton's October 2011 letter to Iranian officials, Iran's chief nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili said February 14 that his government is ready to resume nuclear talks with the P5+1 at the "earliest" opportunity.

Clinton said the P5+1 is now collectively engaged in thorough diplomatic consultations to evaluate Jalili's response.

According to Ashton's 2011 letter, the P5+1 had said any discussions with Iran would need to begin with talks about its nuclear activities.

"Iran's response to Cathy's letter does appear to acknowledge and accept that," Clinton said.

Ashton had also asked for assurances that there would be "a sustained effort by Iran to come to the table, to work until we have reached an outcome that has Iran coming back into compliance with their international obligations," Clinton said.

In her remarks, Ashton also welcomed the possibility that Iran may be ready to resume discussions.

"I am cautious and I am optimistic at the same time," Ashton said.

Iran last had talks with the P5+1 in January 2011, during which the group offered a series of suggested confidence-building measures Iran could take to help move the process forward. In addition, Ashton said the P5+1 has continued to offer its October 2009 proposal to provide Iran's Tehran Research Reactor with enriched uranium fuel, provided that the enrichment be done outside Iran to ensure that the uranium would not be enriched to a level that could be used for nuclear weapons.

"If we start the talks, we want to sustain them," and therefore there will need to be a process to allow P5+1 to clarify what they want to achieve and "what we're expecting from the Iranians," Ashton said.

"That's what we're in the process of doing right now," she said.

5. Ambassador Rice on U.N. General Assembly Resolution on Syria (02-16-2012)

Statement by Ambassador Susan E. Rice, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, on the UN General Assembly Resolution on Syria, February 16, 2012

Today, the UN General Assembly sent a clear message to the people of Syria: the world is with you. An overwhelming majority of UN member states have backed the plan put forward by the Arab League to end the suffering of Syrians. Bashar al-Assad has never been more isolated. A rapid transition to democracy in Syria has garnered the resounding support of the international community. Change must now come.

This resolution strongly condemns Assad's 11-month campaign of murder and torture. It demands an end to the killing machine. It demands that the Syrian government release all political prisoners; assure the freedom of peaceful demonstrations; and guarantee full and safe access to Arab League representatives and international media, and to humanitarian aid workers, who seek only to protect a people who have endured unimaginable violence.

The international community has just given its firm support to the Arab League's plan to facilitate a Syrian-led political transition to a democratic, plural political system, "in which citizens are equal regardless of their affiliations or ethnicities or beliefs." The only question is how many more women, men and children — from demonstrators on Syria's streets to those taking shelter in homes and hospitals — will suffer or be killed by Assad before that transition begins.

The people of Syria, from Homs and Damascus to Hama and Idlib, from Aleppo to Daraa, should now know that the nations of the world stand with you and support you as you pursue a future of freedom and safety.

6. Assistant Secretary Gordon's Interview with BBC on Iran (02-16-2012)

U.S. Department of State
Interview With Geeta Guru-Murthy of BBC

Philip H. Gordon, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, Brussels, Belgium
February 15, 2012

QUESTION: I'm joined now by the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Philip Gordon who's on the line, though in Brussels.

Do you believe that Iran is behind this set of explosions?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY GORDON: It would be premature to make that allegation now based on what we know. Clearly these attacks are troubling, it seems to be a troubling pattern, we support a full investigation to understand and I don't want to get ahead of what those investigations might reveal.

QUESTION: President Ahmadinejad has been speaking in the last few minutes, he is saying that those who oppose Iran getting nuclear weapons have got nuclear weapons themselves, that his opponents claim to have humanitarian interests but they don't, clearly Iran pressing ahead, what is the twin-track policy of the United States right now, are you finding ways to negotiate?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY GORDON: Well we do have a twin-track policy and I want to make very clear that we're determined on both tracks that is to say, so long as Iran is not abiding by its obligations in the international community, U.N. security council resolutions on its enrichment program, we are determined to continue to rally international support to raise the costs on Iran for failing to abide by its obligations. But at the same time we are also sincere in wanting to resolve this diplomatically, and I think President Obama has been very explicit that we are ready to talk, invitations have been extended to Iran by Katherine Ashton, the High Representative for the European Union's foreign policy, to come and meet and we are looking to Iran to respond substantively to that invitation and to bring it back to the negotiating table and until and unless they do, I think you will see an increasingly determined and united international community and you've seen even in recent weeks that pressure rise and I think it's having an impact in Iran.

QUESTION: Do you think Israel is close to launching a strike on Iran now as Leon Panetta your defense secretary suggested?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY GORDON: I don't want to speculate on what Israel might do, but clearly the talk on such an action reflects what everybody knows is growing concerns throughout the region and in Israel, about what many Israelis consider to be a potentially existential threat, all the more reason for us to up our efforts in the international community both to show Iran that there is a different way forward which is a diplomatic one but also to show it that if it fails, it runs real risks of growing isolation, and...

QUESTION: How, How long do you think there is...in terms of...

ASSISTANT SECRETARY GORDON: ...again I need to underscore the international community really is increasingly united on this front and we are seeing more and more countries sign on to very tough sanctions to send a signal to Iran that it really needs to come back and talk seriously about this enrichment program.

QUESTION: How long is the diplomatic window now before it becomes impossible for the West to intervene?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY GORDON: We don't know and we don't want to put a deadline on it but clearly it is an increasingly urgent issue and again the speculation about Israeli use of force is one factor that should remind everybody that now is the time, one for the international community to keep the pressure on and even more importantly for Iran...

QUESTION: OK, Mr. Secretary, Mr. Gordon, we'll have to leave it there, sorry, we are out of time. Thank you very much for watching.

7. Panetta Outlines U.S. Troop Changes in Europe (02-16-2012)

By Karen Parrish
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Feb. 16, 2012 – Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta met with German Defense Minister Thomas de Maizière at the Pentagon today, as Defense Department officials announced details of planned changes in the U.S. military presence in Europe.

The Army will inactivate its Germany-based 170th and 172nd infantry brigades this year and in fiscal 2014, respectively, officials announced, as part of a change that will cut U.S. service members in Europe from about 80,000 now to about 70,000 in 2017.

“The minister understands the necessity of the shifts we are making as we work to implement our new defense strategy while meeting our fiscal responsibilities,” Panetta said during a press briefing with his German counterpart.

The secretary said he and de Maizière had a productive meeting today, as they had earlier this month in both Brussels and Munich where both attended NATO defense meetings and the annual Munich Security Conference.

Panetta thanked de Maizière for his leadership both in NATO deliberations and in his nation's “very steadfast” support to the alliance-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.

“Germany has been with us from the very beginning,” the secretary said. “The German military plays a very important role as the lead for ISAF Regional Command North.”

Germany is both a top troop contributor for ISAF and a top funding contributor for Afghan security force sustainment, he noted.

The German people have shown great commitment through a decade of war in Afghanistan, Panetta said. He offered his condolences to the families of the 50 German service members killed in combat there.

“Thousands of German troops are fighting courageously alongside U.S., coalition and Afghan forces,” he said. “They’ve worked to establish security in Mazar-e Sharif and Herat, and they continue to keep the pressure on the enemy.”

De Maizièrè took a lead role in bringing together fellow NATO defense ministers in reaffirming support for the Afghanistan commitments the nations’ leaders made at a summit in Lisbon, Portugal, in 2010, Panetta said.

“We have joined in the commitment of ‘in together, out together’ ... and I’m grateful for that, and I’m particularly grateful for his leadership in helping us achieve that common path,” he said.

Turning to adjustments in European basing, the secretary noted some 40,000 U.S. troops will remain in Germany after the two heavy brigades depart. He added those forces will continue to train with partner nations’ forces and maintain a high state of readiness for future international operations.

“I am very grateful, as are all American people, for the very warm hospitality U.S. troops and their families enjoy in Germany,” he said. “Germany has been an incredible host.”

Panetta noted along with forces stationed in Europe, the Defense Department is planning rotational troop training deployments to augment multinational training opportunities.

De Maizièrè, speaking through an interpreter, said he cannot object to the United States modernizing and reshaping its forces, as his own nation is making the same effort with its military.

Panetta has been “transparent from the very beginning” about the planned changes to U.S. forces in Europe, de Maizièrè noted, and added American troops, family members and civilians in remaining U.S. military organizations will “always be welcome in Germany.”

The two heavy brigades the Army will inactivate in Germany have not been modernized, and disbanding them will save the Army money as it prepares to reduce its ranks by 70,000 soldiers, a senior defense official speaking on background told reporters today.

Other U.S. troop adjustments in Europe include the inactivation of V Corps Headquarters in Wiesbaden, Germany; the move of U.S. Army Europe Headquarters from Heidelberg, Germany, to Wiesbaden; the inactivation of the Air Force’s 81st Fighter Squadron at Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany; and inactivation of the 603rd Air Control Squadron at Aviano Air Base, Italy. The Army will also relocate elements of the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team from locations in Germany to the brigade’s long-planned consolidated location in Vicenza, Italy.

Forces that will remain in Europe include the 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment at Vilseck, Germany, and the 173rd at Vicenza. A senior defense official today called those modernized units two of the Army's "cutting-edge" troop formations.

De Maizière noted "high-value" U.S. units are remaining in Germany.

"I believe the impact of the units leaving will be moderate," he said. "Germany will remain the country where the bulk of U.S. troops will remain stationed, and this underscores that Germany is a strategically valuable ... location for our American friends."

Joseph Garvey, a senior U.S. Army Europe official, told American Forces Press Service USAREUR's commander, Lt. Gen. Mark P. Hertling, has visited communities across Germany in recent weeks to address troop and family concerns about the pending moves.

Hertling assured Army families their leaders in Europe will do everything possible to limit upheaval for soldiers, family members and civilians, Garvey said.

The general also told troops and families leaders will work to ensure those affected by the moves are treated with dignity and respect as the Army in Europe works through this transition, Garvey added.

Biographies:

[Leon E. Panetta](#)

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